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SUBJECT: SUDAN: ETHIOPIAN STATE MINISTER TEKEDA DISCUSSES
CPA AND DARFUR

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for Reasons 1.4 (b)(d).

¶1. (C//NF) SUMMARY. On December 5, Ambassador, visiting Sudan Program Group officials, and PolOff met with Ethiopian State Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu to discuss Ethiopia's views on Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and Darfur. Tekeda explained that Ethiopia's foreign policy objective in Sudan was to balance relations between the northern and southern governments. He said that the failure of the CPA would have detrimental consequences for Ethiopia and stated that Ethiopia preferred Sudanese unity if given the choice. Tekeda opined that Khartoum would be more cooperative with the international community if the United States made it clear that it was not seeking regime change in Sudan. Tekeda added that Prime Minister Meles would use a December 5 visit to Khartoum to inquire whether there was a role for Ethiopia as an interlocutor between the north and south. He warned, however, that Eritrea was already attempting to drive a wedge between Ethiopia and the southern Sudanese and would attempt to interfere with any Ethiopian led initiatives in Sudan. Finally, Tekeda reaffirmed Ethiopia's intent to send peacekeeping troops to Darfur, but cautioned that Ethiopia needed to see modest political progress between Khartoum and the rebels before sending the first troops. END SUMMARY.

ETHIOPIA ATTEMPTING TO BALANCE NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS

¶2. (C//NF) Tekeda opened by stating Ethiopia's goal regarding Sudan was to balance relations between Khartoum and Juba and highlighted that Ethiopia was the only country that bordered both the north and the south. He said that maintaining good relations with both governments often put his government in a difficult spot, but that Ethiopia had little choice but to maintain the relationships. Tekeda further remarked that Ethiopia had kept its distance from the Darfur issue in order to uphold the balance.

CPA FAILURE HOLDS SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR ETHIOPIA

13. (C//NF) Tekeda said that the unraveling of the CPA would have serious consequences for Ethiopia. He said that if Ethiopia's western border became a problem, Ethiopia would be surrounded on all corners by instability and threats including Eritrea to the north and Somalia to the south and east. This was a scenario Ethiopia eagerly wanted to avoid.

14. (C//NF) Tekeda assessed that the major problem of the CPA was the lack of confidence between the northern National Congress Party (NCP) and the southern Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). He said the southerners needed to be treated as equals and the consensus in the south was that Khartoum was not taking them seriously. He commented that if this issue was not addressed, any talk of maintaining the unity of Sudan would be vacuous.

15. (C//NF) Tekeda made it clear that no matter the outcome of the CPA, whether unity or separation, the process must be carried out peacefully. He said if given a choice Ethiopia would prefer a unified Sudan, but that peace was paramount. He commented that southern independence would be difficult and that there would be no guarantee of stability or that there would be only one southern Sudanese state.

16. (C//NF) When queried whether international pressure would move Khartoum to cooperate more fully with CPA implementation, Tekeda responded that pressure combined with actions designed to enhance confidence between Khartoum and the international community would be effective. He said Khartoum suspects the United States is attempting to use the CPA to seek regime change. Tekeda postulated that if Khartoum was confident that regime change was not the objective, then Khartoum would cooperate and many of the current problems would be alleviated.

PM MELES SEEKING ROLE AS NORTH-SOUTH INTERLOCUTOR

17. (C//NF) According to Tekeda, PM Meles planned to approach Sudanese President Bashir on December 5 during a visit to Khartoum to inaugurate the opening of a new Ethiopian-Sudanese road about the possibility of Ethiopia serving as an interlocutor between the NCP and the SPLM. Tekeda said Meles would not press the issue if Meles received pushback from Bashir. Tekeda added that Meles had called both Bashir and SPLM leader Salva Kiir immediately after the SPLM threatened to withdraw from the CPA in November, but that because the NCP and SPLM resolved the recent crisis bilaterally Meles did not have the opportunity to fully engage. Tekeda added that Meles would want strong assurances from the United States that his efforts in Sudan would be supported.

ERITREA A POTENTIAL SPOILER

18. (C//NF) Tekeda warned that Ethiopia's entry into north-south negotiations would be complicated by Eritrea which was already attempting to drive a wedge between Addis Ababa and Juba. Tekeda said that although Ethiopia cooperated with the SPLM in many sensitive areas, the SPLM was careful not to appear close to Addis Ababa in order to maintain its relationship with Asmara. He also observed that Kiir had yet to visit Ethiopia and that there were Eritreans in Juba but he did not know what they were doing there. Tekeda speculated that Asmara would attempt to derail Ethiopian involvement in north-south negotiations.

DARFUR: POLITICAL PROGRESS NEEDED BEFORE WE SEND TROOPS

19. (C//NF) On the issue of Darfur, Tekeda said the Ethiopian government had made a careful deliberate decision to send troops to the region that would be fulfilled, but that there needed to be some modest improvement in the

political situation before deployment would begin. He reiterated that the speed of Ethiopian troop deployment would depend on political progress between Khartoum and the many rebel factions. He emphasized that Ethiopia had not set an unrealistic benchmark of a full political settlement for deployment, but that his government was looking for some progress beyond the current, "complete stalemate." He also commented that Khartoum needs to resolve its problems with the UN.

COMMENT

¶10. (C//NF) In recent months the Ethiopian government has displayed a greater sense of concern regarding developments in Sudan and Post recommends Washington consider how to best leverage Ethiopia's desire to become engaged in the CPA process. Post's interactions with the host government confirm that the Ethiopian military's preparations to send troops to Darfur are progressing and Post anticipates the first Ethiopian battalion will be ready for deployment early in the new year. Prime Minister Meles speaks frequently with President Bashir and visited Khartoum prior to the Lisbon EU-AU meeting to engage Bashir to send NCP members to the upcoming IGAD summit on Sudan. Meles had tried in vain to get a NCP person to participate in the Secretary's hosted Sudan meeting in Addis Ababa on December 5. Meles has often told us that he is concerned about the 2009 Sudan elections and the potential for problems if the CPA is not pushed vigorously now. Meles firmly believes that strong international support for the CPA is critical to its success.
END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO